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The term "liberalism" seems to be developing a religious usage which gives it growing significance. It is more sharply contrasted with fundamentalism, and signifies a far deeper meaning than modernism. Fundamentalism describes a relatively uncritical attitude. In it custom, traditionalism, and authoritarianism are dominant. Protestant fundamentalism boasts its full acceptance of the Bible "from cover to cover." The slogan, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; and where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent," has been adopted by many denominations, though they may differ much in their use of it. Modernism is a weakened adherence to that slogan but without surrender of the authoritarian principle itself. There is an inherent vagueness in the word, because the meaning of "modern" is entirely relative, and lacks any specific characteristic other than contemporaneousness.

Religious modernism, as used in current discussions, generally refers to movements of thought since the middle of the nineteenth century, and the tendency of those who reject it is to view it as going into decline with the change of mood after the war. Many who now regard themselves as more modern than modernists have taken their stand as medievalists or as adherents of a rationalism which they hold to be timeless! The modernism of the late nineteenth century was a partial and piece-meal use of the critical method. Higher criticism was accepted as it related to the history and literature of the Bible, but for many such critics the results did not mean any serious change in fundamental theological doctrines. Scientific discoveries in ge-

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ology only changed the dates and the character of the creative process but were not assumed to deny supernatural causes. Miracles might require more time than in the older view but they were still miracles. The fundamentalists were more consistent, insisting that if the views of the higher critics and the evolutionists were allowed in any degree the consequence was a thorough rejection of the traditional authority of the Bible and the Protestant religion built upon it.

That modernism was half-hearted and fragmentary is emphasized by the fact that many of those who were drawn to it in their youth have since turned away from it.[1] This reaction, however, has been due in part to the recent change in the intellectual mood induced by the depression. The times require something firmer and more vigorous than a halfway adaptation of traditional concepts to the demands of the new outlook so recently forming in the physical, biological, and social sciences. No adequate formulation of the religious implications of these sciences was at hand, no solving philosophy of religion was formulated in these terms. Old, familiar religious ideas with their emotional overtones and psychological conditioning were at hand and easily yielded themselves to philosophies long associated with religious orthodoxy. The facile revival of Calvinism and Lutheranism, under the pressure of events, and with the leadership of men like Karl Barth, shows how slight and tenuous were the developments of modernism, as compared with the deep rootage of orthodoxy.

On the other hand, there is reason to believe that modernism never came to full consciousness of itself, of its lineage, of its real power, or of its possible appeal. Liberalism, as here conceived, designates a longer and broader movement, having its religious phase throughout, but not being primarily concerned with religion. Liberalism is a general

[1] Rheinhold Niebuhr and W. M. Horton are among these. See Realistic Theology, p. 1. In this book Horton uses the word "liberalism" interchangeably with "modernism."

movement of Western culture, having its political, economic, scientific, and religious aspects. Its common characteristics in all these fields are the critical quest for liberty, for freedom, for growth in the capacity and power of individuals and societies to achieve more satisfying ways of living. The beginnings of this movement were in the rise of the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation.

The Renaissance moved toward emphasis upon an understanding and appreciation of the natural world and of human life within that scene. The Reformation sought to free men from ecclesiastical institutionalism and authority, and to encourage the individual to seek access to God directly without external mediation. Luther's insistence on the text, "The just shall live by faith," epitomized the spirit of his message. This demand for the rights of the individual is the central motive of liberalism and the basis of successive revolutions in politics, economics, and religion. But these rights have been differently interpreted in different periods and under changing circumstances, for the pursuit of them has often given rise to new and unexpected oppressions, such as institutional fixation and doctrinal dogmatism.

The political liberalism of the eighteenth century claimed the natural right of men to throw off the domination of autocratic governments and to gain freedom for themselves on behalf of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The conception of this natural right, however, remained unanalyzed and negative, simply asserting for the most part this divine right of human beings over against the divine right of kings. The checks thrown about the new forms of popular government show how partial and tentative were the convictions which the new democracies embodied. But in spite of such limitations the common man felt himself possessed of a new dignity and responded with intense patriotism to the support of an order in which he felt a real share and a genuine responsibility. He sensed

the need of better understanding of the relations and duties he had accepted and avowed the need of education to bear his part effectively. The favorable circumstances of a rich, unsettled land in America gave opportunity and outlet for energy and ambition where a minimum of political control gave scope to a maximum of enterprise and toil. This political freedom extended to the citizen's religious freedom too, and enabled him to hold his faith or to modify it as he would. The escape from a state church and a prescribed body of doctrine gave him at least the form of religious liberty, even though his ideas and doctrines were still largely prescribed by inherited habits and customs.

Economic liberalism also rested upon the theory of individual rights and found its formula in the doctrine of laissez faire. The doctrine was highly compatible, both in theory and in practice, with the economic life of America, where the people were mainly farmers, and where the rewards of labor were in fairly direct relation to effort and intelligence, but unlikely to reach great inequalities of wealth. The political system, devised to protect the freedom of the individual, offered consistent support to that principle of laissez faire, and the religious ideal of individual faith as a private possession, pointing to the salvation of the individual soul, fitted into the same general conception. In a very real sense the religious liberalism of that period was basic to both political and economic liberalism, for it was the importance of the individual in the natural order with inherent natural rights which required his freedom as a citizen and his right to his share, fairly gained, in the fruits of his toil.

John Locke, whose doctrine of the rights of the individual appears in political and economic liberalism, also gave the intellectual formulation of religious liberalism. He emphasized the reasonableness of religion, but the reasonableness was more apparent in the restatement which he made than in

the system with which he started. In a very memorable passage he insists that men must use reason in determining the claims of revelation. It is our duty, he asserts, to accept what revelation offers, but we must first make certain that it is a revelation! Doubtless what he intended by establishing the validity of the revelation before accepting it was the examination of the evidences of its genuineness, such as the circumstances, the veracity of witnesses, and the consistency of the message. It was the assumption that if the trustworthiness of the messenger were proved, it would be reasonable to receive without question the message brought.

Although Locke did not define or give a critical analysis of what he meant by reason, it is evident from his application of it that he conceived it in terms of empiricism rather than in terms of rationalism. He does contrast the methods of deduction and induction and finds the latter the fruitful means of furthering human knowledge. His "new way of ideas" is experimental and factual. While not infallible, it is sufficient for the practical guidance of life. It led him to reject metaphysical, theological speculations, and to employ reason in the concrete field of human relations and moral obligations. Many consequences which he did not foresee were developed from his empiricism, such as deism and the skepticism of Hume, while the more constructive issues of a later empiricism waited upon a long historical process of critical thought. But the reasonableness of his practical mind did release him from much of the superstition, mysticism, and emotionalism of the religious systems of his time. He rejected the doctrine of innate ideas and the mysticism of "the inner light." His reasonableness freed his religious thought in principle from the domination of custom and ecclesiastical authority. He made the church a purely voluntary association, with no power save over its own members, and that the power of persuasion based on what he conceived

to be the reasonable interpretation of the Scriptures. He left little place for obedience to blind faith.

Bentham and John Stuart Mill applied themselves to a more searching study of the nature of the self and to the grounds of the claims it makes for freedom and for satisfaction. Under their analysis the self began to emerge from the mysterious metaphysical and theological "soul" into a functional reality which has continued to define itself in terms of desires and their satisfaction. Although Mill was still troubled by the difficulties of his inherited atomistic conception of desires, he nevertheless asserted their social character and emphasized the possibility of cultivating sympathy and of being motivated by "the greatest good of the greatest number." His programs and practical efforts toward social reforms evidenced a sounder psychology than did his theoretical statements. He recognized the pleasures of the imagination and gave place to the cultivation of the higher emotions. He advocated woman's suffrage, championed the abolition of slavery in the United States, devoted himself to bettering the condition of the laboring classes, and to co-operative agriculture. Mill carried this devotion to humanity to the heights of a religious faith. In his essay on *The Utility of Religion* he asks, "What does religion do for society, and what for the individual?" It was for him an enhancement of the significance and the power of religion to conceive it as akin to poetry—"they both supply the same want, that of ideal conceptions grander and more beautiful than we see realized in the prose of life." He ventured to believe in the possibility of the complete liberalization of religion by releasing it from the domination of metaphysical dogmas and turning it toward the idealization of our earthly life, and to a cultivation of a high conception of what it may be made.[2]

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[2]For fuller comment on Mill's views of religion see Ames, **Religion**, pp. 24 ff.

Liberalism has also developed through successive representatives a more functional interpretation of reason. Instead of being regarded as a mysterious faculty or power with which man is inherently endowed, reason is to be better understood as a process of practical operations, of finding paths out of the woods of difficult situations, of looking about in the fields of experience to find the materials and the instruments for building bridges to cross the streams, or to erect houses for shelter, or to create more satisfying and liberating forms of political and economic life. By the same method the imaginative formulation of ideals and the discovery and invention of means for their realization are possible. It was this kind of reasonableness in religion toward which Locke pointed the way and which Mill and others have applied more thoroughly. In general, this historical movement has been in the direction of discovering the complexities and the capacities of the self which are the basis of human "rights," and whose fuller recognition and fulfilment involve also a larger conception and promotion of a free society.

The contribution of William James to liberalism in religion was by way of further discoveries of the nature of the self, of the varieties of religious experience, of the elucidation of freedom of the will, and of the idea of a finite God. Although he devoted slight attention to the consequences of his psychological studies for theological systems and institutional religion, those consequences are obvious to anyone who will reflect upon them. He wrote "psychology without a soul" but he put in place of the soul a self so real and vital that it becomes something more worthy and more capable of freedom, and better able to function in a religion of social idealism. He saw that the self is not an entity apart, but a society of selves, the selves being constituted of the manifold interests which relate the living organism to the life of the world. Thus every person has as many selves as he has

possessions and functions. *"A man's Me is the sum total of all that he can call his,* not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account."[3] There are as many social selves in a person as there are groups to which he belongs, or as there are persons with whom he is acquainted. There is in this description of fact an effective answer to those who question how the thinking of an individual can have social significance, or how religion is social in its nature. It is no longer a problem as to how an isolated being gets out of his inclosed isolation into effective relation with his fellows. He is already, in his very nature, identified with them and they with him, yet each person is unique in the precise character of these relations, and in their extent and function. Such a psychology has no difficulty in making clear the reality of human sympathy and of a socially shared life. It provides the solution to a problem and an inconsistency which the associational psychology of Bentham and Mill could not resolve.

In his *Varieties of Religious Experience* James gave the answer once and for all to those who conceive it possible or desirable to limit religious experience to a single pattern, or to a defined body of doctrine. Here are arrayed the once-born and the twice-born, the pietists and the rationalists, the Catholics and the Protestants, the Christians and the Moslems, the mystics and the apostles of good works, the New Thought cults and the Evangelicals. The religious lives of men are seen to be their lives of aspiration, of defeat and recovery, of fantasy and heroic labor in pursuit of beckoning ideals. The terms of the description of their own emotions are the terms of their respective cultures and of their education and powers of self-analysis.

The conception of a finite God was another

[3]Psychology, I, 291.

distinctive contribution of James to religious liberalism, not that he thought of it as such a contribution but because the idea is one which tends to release religious attitudes from the difficulties inherent in traditional supernaturalism with its doctrines of perfectionism, absolutes, and fixed decrees. James could not fit the facts of the world and life as he observed them to the idea of an infinite, all-good, all-powerful, all-wise God. Neither could he understand the struggle and tragedy of human life in the traditional conception which viewed deity as complete and self-sufficient. In a memorable passage, dealing with the question, "Is Life Worth Living?" he says:

"God himself, in short, may draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity. For my own part, I do not know what the sweat and blood and tragedy of this life mean, if they mean anything short of this. If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is no better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will. But it *feels* like a real fight,—as if there were something really wild in the universe which we, with all our idealities and faithfulnesses, are needed to redeem."

These words also suggest the belief in the freedom of the will, that is, the possibility of setting up in imagination ends or plans of action which by our endeavor and fidelity we may realize. Such ends are not magical ideas unrelated to past experience, but are, rather, stages in an outreaching process of imaginative and practical reconstruction of experience.

Professor Dewey, in *A Common Faith,* has recently added another chapter to the interpretation of religious liberalism. He emphasizes the obstacles which supernaturalism puts in the way of the freedom of the individual. Supernaturalism involves the assumption of a completed, authoritarian system of goods already set up. It tends to fix

traditional forms of thought and to coerce belief and action into its pre-established frame. The consequence is an exaggerated sense of dependence and obedience in man which inhibits vital idealism and free, creative growth. This supernaturalism has diverted human effort from the quest for the discovery and pursuit of realizable goods to the search for proofs of the existence of a God and for ways of conformity to his will. The result of these inquiries admitted by the theologians and metaphysicians themselves has been elaborate rationalizations which remain inconclusive and conflicting. These systems of theology end in new and impossible demands upon "faith," or lead to some form of pious mysticism or agnosticism. If they are taken as proving their claims they only bind men the more tightly in subjection and passive obedience.

Professor Dewey turns from *religion* so conceived and gives his attention to the *religious*—the religious quality in experience. This he finds in the effort to secure satisfying values in life as we mortals live it, and in the discovery of the ways and means of stabilizing and enhancing these values. In this endeavor he finds the great instrument to be scientific method, which has already contributed so much to an understanding of the nature of the world and of man and has provided effective means for producing the material necessities of life, for promoting health, for furthering education, communication, and the arts. The invention of machinery has lifted the burden of untold drudgery from men and has guaranteed the possibility of supplying the basic essentials for elemental needs if a just system of distribution can be attained.

This scientific method is the direct heir of the reasonableness of the earlier stage of liberalism. In the period since Locke it has been developed into a far more adequate and fruitful process. This method has enabled man to see something of the dimensions of space and time within which his life moves, and to appreciate better the long ascent of

the race by means of the creation of tools, language, and social organization. It has been anything but a smooth evolution. One charge brought against liberalism is that it has taken progress for granted and has failed to recognize the tragic and the demonic aspects of existence. Certainly James and Dewey have not minimized the tragic features. The latter constantly reminds us that life is hazardous, precarious, fateful, but he does see something more than gloom. He knows that there is some stability, some fruition, some achievement, some eventuation of plans and ideals, and he makes it clear that human beings can do something to further these more satisfying experiences. He has expressed his faith in the possibility of liberalism in social action, in his recently published lectures on this subject. That faith concerns the intelligent control of the distribution as well as the production of material goods, and also the extension of opportunities of sharing in all cultural goods and idealities.

The problem of the distribution of goods is the acute economic question at the present time. It is made difficult by the extreme development of individualism and the laissez faire attitude in business and industry. The failure of liberalism has been inferred from the injustices which have appeared in this development, but it may be too early to judge whether these injustices may not be overcome by intelligent modification of the system under which they arose. There are those who despair of the application of the scientific method to the social order, and it may be that no particular form of that method now in operation is sufficient to meet the need — but the scientific method has already found ways of adapting itself from use in the physical sciences to the field of the biological sciences, and has made beginnings, at least, in the social sciences. It is a feature of the liberal attitude that it has the courage to adventure into new fields and nowhere with greater determination than in those

regions which affect human welfare so much as do social customs and institutions. In a society with as much experience and success in democracy and social change as in the United States it is scarcely likely that communism or fascism can be precipitated without a more thorough trial of experimentation in conscious social adjustment to present needs.

The more immediate concern in this discussion of religious liberalism is the recognition of the relation of the religious interest and the economic. It is just because economics is so vital to human welfare that it becomes a religious problem. If the two could be separated in real life they might be separated in theory. But since the material conditions so vitally condition the freedom or the servitude of moral and spiritual interests these material conditions definitely involve man's chances of realizing religious values. An inheritance from the continuation of the old individualism is the fallacy expressed in the saying "business is business." That saying implies that business has the right, because it so largely has the power, to dictate the separation, if not the subjugation, of moral and religious interests. It is undoubtedly true that free religious thought and expression are now compromised by intimidation in more or less subtle ways by the influence of concentrated wealth. Religious idealism is concerned with the whole man. No human interest is foreign to it. Health, education, politics, peace, industry and business are integral to the realization of the good and satisfying life. Indeed, the religious attitude, in the sense here employed, makes its own demand within the economic field itself, for business cannot successfully operate without at least a modicum of regard for human rights and welfare, as is shown by the concessions of capital to labor in matters of wages, hours, and working conditions. The meaning of a "living wage" lies in the recognition of the fact

that human beings may justly demand humane consideration.

Professor Merriam has shown the interdependence of politics and economics, and Professor Hocking has shown that economics involves the whole man.[4] It need scarcely be said that this conception of the relation of the religious to other concerns is not a demand of any religious dogma or institution but is rather just the statement of fact about the interdependence of human values, and of the conception of religious values as identical with the whole scope of human values in their most ideal formulation and outlook. It is an assertion of the identity of the sacred and the secular. Wherever men seek emancipation and release for the discovery and furtherance of a more ideal life there is a religious quest. Wherever and whenever it is possible to affirm and enhance the possession of genuine values, there is opportunity for religious symbolization and celebration. Effective dramatization and artistic representation of these values is religious whether it occurs in a church or in a theater.[5]

Religious liberalism does not accept the traditional doctrine of original sin. Social psychology recognizes the process of conditioning through social heredity but makes it clear that this conditioning does not always weight the personality of the child in one direction alone. Life is mixed and the individual born into the family and its associated life is the center and object of many influences. Some of them are good and some are bad. A child has a better chance to form good habits and attitudes in a wholesome and cultivated family but sometimes such a child suffers from indulgence or from associations at school or on the street. The environment of any person is complex and children in the same home may be influenced by differ-

[4]C. E. Merriam, "Putting Politics in Its Place," **International Journal of Ethics, January, 1936**; W. E. Hocking, "The Future of Liberalism," **Journal of Philosophy, April 25, 1935.**

[5]Ames, "Religious Ceremonials," in W. C. Bower's **The Church at Work in the Modern World.**

ent factors in that environment, which is the same thing as saying that the nature and activity of a person help to select the environment to which he responds. The doctrine of original sin is a striking illustration of the way an idea long believed and deeply held may fetter the souls of men. It has served to bar the door to opportunity, it has cut the nerve of hope by imposing the conviction of being fated to an evil end, it has imposed endless penances upon normal people, and it has made religion a dour and joyless thing. This doctrine has affected legislation, and has thwarted efforts at reform. It has taken the particular, plural sins of men and grouped them all together under the capitalized word, Sin, and then constructed amazing doctrines of the necessity of supernatural grace to make atonement and salvation possible! From all this, religious liberals pray, "Good Lord, deliver us!"

That the world of human conduct and relations is mixed as to the goods and evils in it seems plain enough. They may be called natural goods and evils, since they seem to appear in all societies and at all levels. They are "the wheat and the tares," and just as it is possible to take wild wheat and cultivate it into better wheat, so it is possible to select the goods of human life and nourish them into better goods. As art develops beauty, as science increases truths, so religious values may be multiplied and enhanced. This increment of values may be called the increment of the divine in life. C. DeLisle Burns, in his book, *The Horizon of Experience,* in the chapter on religion, says: "Deity is 'made' in the sense in which beauty in a work of art is made. Clearly in some sense deity is found, but not without some preliminary creative act of minds. The sacred, for example, is anything made sacred by the power which the minds of men put into it." For Professor Dewey, the idea of God, or the idea of the divine, is the idea of "ideal possibilities unified through imaginative

realization and projection." He suggests that the power and significance of the traditional conceptions of God may be due to the ideal qualities referred to by these conceptions, to the values to which we are supremely devoted when these values take on unity. The hypostatization and projection of a unified system of values is then easily made. God is such an ideal, divine reality.

Such a conception of God, or the divine, gives organization and support to religious values and at the same time allows freedom for further growth and enrichment of experience. It is compatible with a certain type of mystical experience, that is, of that elevating and ecstatic experience which comes with the contemplation of the sublime in nature or with participation in some climacteric event in human discovery or achievement. This conception of the divine derives meaning from the aspirations and heroic devotion of men in all significant pursuits, and unifies their idealistic endeavors into a significant "kingdom of ends." Religious leaders at the present time are much concerned over the loss of dynamic and vitality in religion. Some think to secure it by more strenuous adherence to the traditional doctrines, but they do not reckon with the vast change which has come in our intellectual climate, especially in the last century. There is no doubt that the loss of the traditional faith has left many people confused and rudderless, and they are finding that there is no adequate satisfaction in mere excitement or in flight from their finer ideals. They crave a sense of deeper meaning and direction for their life. Religious liberalism, not as a cult but as an attitude and method, turns to the living realities in the actual tasks of building more significant individual and collective human life.

Protestantism may be regarded as a long struggle to achieve religious freedom. Successive movements have attempted to throw off forms or dogmas which bound the spirit. All of these move-

ments sought their freedom in a return to essential Christianity but all in turn found themselves bound again by the fixation of customs and beliefs. Liberalism today makes bold to seek again the religious quality of that transforming movement, but it seeks for that quality not in the letter but in the spirit. Scholarship has released the personality and the spirit of Jesus from an authoritative text and institution. Now it is something other than miracles and a martyr's death that makes him divine. It is the quality of his soul and his estimate of his fellow-men as worthy of a friendship unto death; it is his refusal to think of himself as their master, and his willingness to be their friend; it is most of all his readiness to subject himself with them to the freedom that comes by truth, and to the justification by which wisdom proves itself.

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